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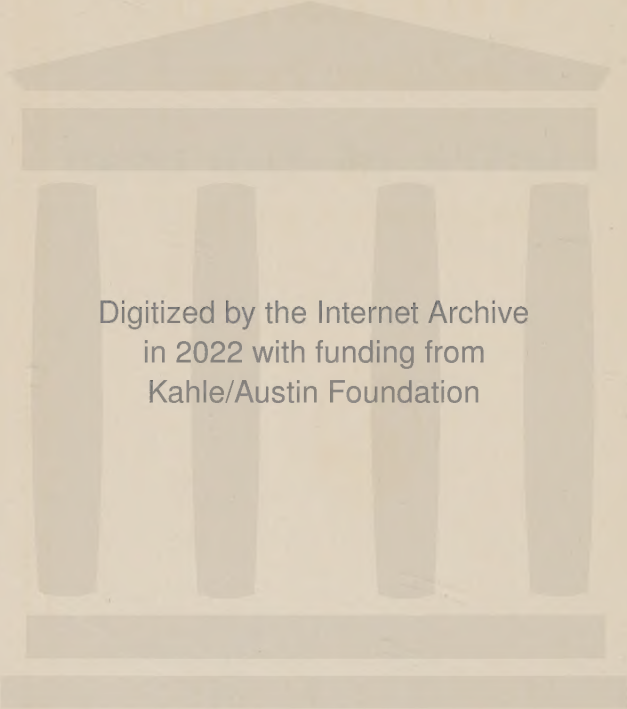
lover of the land, and other poe
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A LOVER OF THE LAND

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A LOVER OF THE LAND

and Other Poems

By
FREDERICK NIVEN



NEW YORK
BONI & LIVERIGHT

1925

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A LOVER OF THE LAND

A LOVER OF THE LAND

I

In England it is April time
Most moves the poets' hearts to rime,
They drunken then with orchard foam,
The heady smell of new-ploughed loam,
A cuckoo calling in dim blue
Of distance, thrushes singing too.

Here, in the west, October is
The month of brimming ecstasies
Because of magic in the land.
Along the mountain-crests now stand
New silver trees, tall pines of snow
Against the blue, while yet below
A bee or butterfly, at noon,
Flecks by, deluded it is June,
The day so warm, so good, so mellow.
The birch-trees now are jets of yellow,
The maples scarlet, in between
The ranked firs in their evergreen.

Tranquillity and ecstasy:
Strange how these twain can allied be.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

But thus it is, while leaves drift down
Yellow and scarlet, gold and brown.

The squirrels have laid in their store;
Our wood-pile's stacked at the back door;
And we are deified with all
The supreme glory of the Fall.

II

Somehow, when I arise at dawn
And see gold threads and silver drawn
Through the stretched silk of eastern sky,
I am both glad and sad thereby.

My gable window frames a tree,
A jack-pine; and it seems to me
The very jack-pine's part of this
Blend of old pain and ecstasies.

To front I spy, and see the lake,
That last I saw in moonlight quake,
Still sliding sidewise, in the grey
And gold beginning of the day.

And O my heart is all astir
To praise the great Artificer
Who made the dawn, the lake, the tree,
And this that loveth them in me.

III

Framed by my door-way I can see
A motionless cotton-poplar tree.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

In the still day it looks as though
A stencil cut in gold, the show
Of Autumn now begun. It stands
Against one strip of silver sands
And one of lapis-lazuli,
A broader strip I know to be
The stretch of lake; and then one more
Thin silver band—the further shore.

That takes us half-way up this tree
That of gold stencil seems to be;
And all the spreading top's inlaid,
Or stamped, upon a background made
Of tones of green and darker yellow—
The mountain opposite, going mellow,
Autumnal, etched too up and down
With thin lines, silver-grey and brown—
The stems of leafless young birch-trees
And of bare tamarack poles are these.

O lovely tree of gold inlaid
On silver, lapis-lazuli, jade!

IV

Sometimes, in Summer time, I think how sad
That my loved birch-trees, in gold sequins clad,
Winds shall blow bare, and bitter Winter come.
No more the twin-flower scent, no more the hum
Of leisurely, brown, gold-dusted bumble-bees,
And this stream too, of liquid gems, must freeze,

A LOVER OF THE LAND

All beauty lie beneath a shroud of snow.

Then Winter comes. I rise one day, and lo,
Out of my gable, on the jack-pine tree,
The fluffy pom-poms of the snow I see—
And sing for joy! Here is no tragic shroud.
It snowed o'er night. Dawn breaks without a
cloud

In all sweet heaven. This world of white and
blue

I had forgotten, had forgotten too
How the frost sparkles to the soaring moon
When January is as good as June.

I had forgot the crisp and peppering sound
Of a dry snow-fall happing up the ground,
And how the hid sun makes a rosy glow
And golden radiance through the whirling snow.

At morn, the blue jays tapping on the pane,
At night, the stars, the sleigh-bells' sweet refrain
I had forgotten; and how creeks flow on
Under green ice and white across them drawn,
Opals through crystal. How at night the stove
Hums, as content, while I in books may rove
All times and countries, blissfully aloof
From small affairs, under my snow-capped roof,
I had forgot, else had I never said:
How sad that Summer is so quickly sped.
Now, in mid-Winter, I do surely know
Too quick the Summers and the Winters go.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

V

I went into the yard to-night
Upon some little final chore
That something in a book I read
Brought to my mind; and at the door
I stood and stared, I stood and stared.
The hills with stars were brimming o'er.

O books, what you do hold me from!
O there I stood, O there I stood
And looked and marvelled in the night,
And knew why God had called it good,
Enamored of the infinite
Between the water and the wood.

Up from the water came a pipe
Of wild ducks resting on their way,
Now Autumn's come, from Arctic shores
To some warm, Caribbean bay;
A happy sound, a pleasing sound,
Though why so pleasing who can say?

Down from the woods there came a roar
As though a railway train went by.
No railroad there! It passed. Once more
Again roared high, roared clamant high,
A wind through night, and on that wind
My spirit soared through starry sky.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Then all was still on either hand,
No pipe of duck, no windy roar,
And I was all alone with stars,
Forgot my book, forgot my chore,
With stars and stars, and still more stars,
Between the forest and the shore.

VI

You ask me why I live here,
As though the place were banned,
And living here a thing no man
Of sense can understand,
A thing bizarre. I live here
Because I love the land.

You say: "It has no history;
No ghosts go by your door."
I can but stare. If ghosts you wish,
Here there are ghosts galore,
From Thompson's in the Rockies
To Vancouver's by the shore.

You say: "It is so far there
From the Berkeley or the Ritz."
But the Berkeley and the Ritz are far
From roasting ducks on spits
Of new green wood where the camp-fire light
Through the sleeping forest flits.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

You say: "In England Robin Hood,
In Scotland old Rob Roy
Have left romance you lack out there."
But surely every boy
Must know that our Bill Miner
Could teach these their employ.

Bill Miner was an outlaw
Beloved of every one!
No man could better ride a horse
Or quicker flick a gun.
Robin and Roy, compared with him,
Were novices outdone.

You say: "But are you not cut off
From Culture, living there?"
And with the sage I would reply,
Smiling (you now may stare):
Earth's centre is where I am;
My mind goes everywhere.

I live here with the weather,
And the seasons' pageantry;
I live with ruffling leaves and streams,
These being more to me
Than all your cities. Here in Time
I touch Eternity.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

I have a shingled house here
That stands among tall trees;
A colored river flows before;
Mountains guard over these.
This "lodge in some vast wilderness"
My soul does greatly please.

The birds and squirrels round me
Make lightsome every chore
Outside, and oft at chores I pause
Just on the scene to pore.
Within I have my books to read.
What could man ask for more?

From humming-birds to sleigh-bells
I love the way life goes
In this lost land, from one view,
But Paradise for those
Who love the world God gave men,
Its Summers and its Snows.

*Willow Point,
Kootenay Lake, 1924.*

MEMORIES

A polished floor with sun thereon,
Albeit all the shades were drawn;
To front and rear doors opened wide;
The patio bricks red-gold outside;
Peace, and my mother sitting there,
Sewing in a great cane chair.
Lombardy poplars, straight and tall,
Tapered beyond the patio wall;
And I, a child of three or four,
Stood looking at them from the door.

My mother then began to sing;
I turned to her, all wondering,
For she was there and yet not there,
Her body sewing in the chair,
Her spirit, in her singing, gone,
Strangely remote, afar, withdrawn.
I ran to her and clasped her knees,
Peered in her eyes for my heart's ease,
These netted eyes that did not see
Her sewing, or the room, or me.

Her singing ceased; she heaved a sigh;
Once more my mother had come nigh.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

The day is fixed. Her gown of blue
I see, with flower-sprigs patterned through.
Pinning a fall of lace she wore
A cameo brooch; and to restore
My comfort after childish grief
I fingered on its bas-relief.
And then she smiled on me, aware;
And still I see her sewing there.

MY WORLD

I took the purple of the heather
And the white of a rose
And the blue hill air, and the wild, wet weather,
With the thought of a woman my glad soul knows:
And I made me a wonderful magic world
Like the globe of rain in a rose-leaf furled,
A world complete and far more real
Than this that we seem to see and feel.

*Connel Ferry,
Argyllshire.*

TO PAULINE

Upon Her Recovery from Sickness

We have been wounded oft so sore
By Godly folk who set no store
On any God except their own,
Grim worshippers, with hearts like stone,
That seldom do we say the name
Of God at all. Yet when the flame
Of health waned low upon thy cheek,
Lately agone, I strove to speak
A prayer unto some Deity
For the recovery of thee,
Although methought: "What will be must,"
And tended thee with heart like dust,
In a great agony. But when
I saw the light return again
In eyes and cheek, there broke from me
Thanks to Almighty God for thee.
Epping Forest, 1913.

NOW GOES OUR LADY TO THE WOODS

Now goes our lady to the woods:
Not that she needeth to take flight:
Her soul has its own solitudes—
Its stars, on the most starless night,
Its light, on the most sunless day.
She takes not flight—she goes away
As quiet, queenly, rare, as here,
In Babylon, when days are drear,
She moves about. She does not fly;
She does not haste; she merely goes—
To where the dreaming poplar rows
Look upward to the Milky Way;
Where men have bliss of stars by night,
And in the pools their broken light;
Behold the gorgeous sun by day;
The colored seasons drifting by:
She takes not flight—but none the less
Does she rejoice again to catch
The spaces to her soul and match
Her quiet soul with quietness.

*Biggin Hill,
Kent, 1908.*

*HER SERVANTS LOOK ON THE LITTLE
MOTHER FROM BETWEEN
THE TAPESTRIES*

She dwelleth there in calm and storm
Weaving upon her loom.
She is so child-like in her face,
Although she hath a god-like grace,
One wonders who hath taught her all
Her mastery of line and form.
Her peaceful singing in the room
Blends with the sound like soft foot-fall
Of faeries, as the shuttles weave. What weaveth
she?
A king's proud mantle or a pall?
What symbols, and what tapestry?

The sun shines in, the light of storm;
She weaves upon her loom.
Hush! Look; she hath a wondrous face,
Our queen; behold her radiant grace.
She weaveth gladly, for us all,
As she hath woven her sacred form,
Out of her soul. Hush! Her foot-fall!

SERVANTS LOOK ON MOTHER

She riseth up to cross the room. What weaveth
she?

The soul's fair cloths, the body's pall.

Hush; hence; let drop the tapestry.

AT MORNING

When I see her sleeping there, in the grey of
morning,

Peace upon her face and her eyelids down,
The first of day arriving for her cheeks' adorning,
Glinting in her tresses on the tints of brown—

Sacred is she to me, in the new day breaking;
There's a trill of birds in the light outside;
On this half the world all things are a-waking,
Life flowing wondrously, like a flowing tide—

Sacred is she to me as she lies there sleeping,
Sacred and mysterious—and O so dear to me:
The treasure of all treasures that God gave to
me for keeping,
To journey with and cherish, midst the
mystery.

Finchley, 1911.

A HARVEST

I fill my heart, I fill my mind
With all the beauty I may find;
I gather many memories
Of such eternal things as these:
The spreading of the light of dawn
Across the sky, along my lawn;
The sigh of wind in high and fine
Needles of tamarack and pine;
The haunting call of laughing loons
Through the warm glow of August noons.

I cull the hazy Pleiades
Netted among my orchard trees
On misty eves; I store away
Venus, beheld just after day
Has gone, and when the early night
Is fragile blue, astounding bright,
Venus, above a hill, alone.

I gather up the blossom strown
From cherry trees in May; I keep
Full moons in mind that, waked from sleep
In lonely camps, I've gazed upon,
Full moons so big, and hushed, and wan,
Over some spectral forest glade,
They almost make the heart dismayed;

A LOVER OF THE LAND

And slender slivers of new moon
Dropping behind a mountain soon.

The happing hush of winter snows,
Great glaciers, and a rain-splashed rose,
And always scent of balsam trees
That brings my soul unto its knees
Within its room within my breast,
Seeming, in scent, God manifest:
These and such things as these I keep
To love, before I turn to sleep.

TREES

I thank my God that I can see
The blossom on the maple tree;
I thank my God when I behold,
Some morning after rain, new gold
Sifted upon the tamaracks,
Whose very name of grandeur smacks,
As of romance does lodge-pole pine;
I thank God for the silver shine,
Through dusk woods, of a birch-tree stem;
I do thank God for all of them,
From tall and stately Douglas fir
To little twisted juniper:
I could go down upon my knees
And sing God thanks for all His trees.

UNDERTONES

In among the rustle of leaves
 (Out on the trail alone),
Heard and lost in the roar of a creek,
How can we tell what voices speak
 Implication in undertone?

Up in the feathery tops of pines
 More than the wind alone
Sighs to me when a wind sighs by;
And something within me makes reply
 In a wordless undertone.

Ah, but I fear the tongue we speak
 Can never make rightly known
What the voice of a creek, or the wind in the
 grass
Talks to travellers as they pass,
 Riding the trail alone.

UNREST

Whence comes this restlessness imploring me
When in Montmartre to seek out Italy?
And when at last I see the falling leaf
In Vallombrosa, why this almost grief
That I can hear not the incoming seas
Roll in toward Appin, past the Hebrides?

Where is my home? I have not any home
Save all the world. To rest I can but roam.
Strange names are friendly to me and I tell
Them o'er as beads. They move me like a spell.

Thus it has been since in my boyish years,
Blurring my school-books, there rose up Algiers;
The very names of caftan and of haik
Called me to Africa for their names' sake.
And now how many an island, mountain, bay
(From the blue crescent curved toward Monterey,
Outlined in silver against yellow sand,
To where I first saw light illumine land
In Chili) are as dear as any friend,
And how far severed! 'Tis some way to wend
From Aconcagua unto Cruachan!
Only in dreams can I wing up and scan,

A LOVER OF THE LAND

As 'twere an orange in my clutch, the whole
God's bauble, magical from pole to pole.

My school-books sloughed, I did not once abate
My travel-speed when Illecillewaet
Then caught my ear. I lived with discontent
Till I had seen the Rocky Mountains rent
By the great waters there, the cañon walls.
I saw and passed; and now again it calls.

When I come home from each outlandish place
Each lures me back, as his beloved's face
Called back Odysseus. Home is not my home;
I have no other rest except to roam.

How shall I rest? There is no rest for me
On any continent, or isle, or sea.
Down the deep gulch of Fleet Street I descry
Mount Shasta, not Saint Paul's, against the sky;
My eyes are filmed, I am lost utterly;
I must go forth again across the sea.

In Okanagan I shall buy a horse
And to the mountains ride. Perchance the gorse
Of Keston Common, breaking then, shall send
A message to me, but I shall not lend
An ear to that; shrewdly I shall recall
The mists of England, their distressful pall;
Or so I purpose as I walk the deck
And Rathlin fades into a foam-flecked speck.

U N R E S T

There shall I camp on fir-boughs featly laid
By some tall fir, in balsam-scented shade.

But shall I rest there? Waking in the night
Among meshed planets and the half-moon's light,
Will not the old-time wonder come again,
Gazing on Mars, if bobolink or wren
Flit thereupon; the longing to inquire
Out of the ether on these sparks of fire
Again torment; once more the Milky Way
Rain restlessness to haunt my joyous day?

There is no home, there is no rest for me
Till, disembodied, all the worlds I see.

Hayes, Kent,
1920.

TRAVELLING

Where am I going to, passing here,
Listening, looking, lending an ear
To the red-breast's trill or the loon's lone call,
To the deep tom-tom of a waterfall,
To the sigh of wind in fir-tree tops,
And hushed in the silence when that stops?
Where am I going to, gazing round
On the rain of flowers that jewel the ground?
Once having seen the dawn, I rise
Often, betimes, for that surprise
Of its beginning, the ancient way,
A pallor, a presence, and in the grey
Something, it seems, that once I knew,
Lost again in the drying dew.

I know not where I go, nor why
The sight of Orion in the sky,
The swerve of a bird, the curve of a hill
With a joy beyond telling my whole heart fill.
Looking, listening, I am glad,
With a wealth not wealthy Cræsus had,
Listening, looking, passing by,
Although I know not where go I.

INVENTORY

Was ever man so drawn before
By diverse loves? One clings to shore;
The other takes the foam-flecked sea
In quest of far adversity.

The one desireth opal rings,
And silks as frail as are the wings
Of humming-birds; carved ivories;
Quaint bronzes made by Japanese;
Old jars, unearthed in Babylon,
The Pharaohs must have looked upon;
Tear-bottles hid two thousand years,
Once moist with Cleopatra's tears,
But now so old they seem to be
Brimful of calm eternity;
Venetian mirrors; scimitars
With jewelled hilts, once used in wars,
But gem-wrought with so much of love
They now like healing unctions prove.

The other calls to sun-scorched toil
By lava-bed and sandy soil,
To travelling the tremendous trail
Where it is splendid even to fail.
It calls unto the sound and sight
Of seas that swirl through purple night,

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Whose stars are magical as when
Jason beheld them and his men.

Ah me! Whichever life I choose
I can but sip of it, must lose
Far more than ever I shall quaff—
Life is so brief, the hours thereof
Too speedy for a man to do
The things of one. I ask for two!

TO THE MYSTERY

These be the things that move my heart,
I know not why:
*A pool; a stream where sunbeams dart;
The song the stream makes flowing by;*

*The gleam of pebbles in the stream;
The wavering light:*
I dipped, and found a stone; the gleam
Passed, as the sun-glow does at night.

A voice beloved: it sang a strain
Of old dead years.
My heart was full of joy—and pain:
The silence after touched to tears.

Roses; my heart is as a home
Where every rose,
Being so loved, might fluttering come
When wind-caßt from its garden-close.

They were too beautiful to pass—
The voice, the air;
Ah! How the rose-leaves strew the grass,
And how the transient things are fair!

A SONG OF SILENCE

If thou possess thy soul in peace,
It matters not what may befall
From seed time, till the Summer's lease
Of flowers is o'er, and on the wall
No roses flutter or birds call.

For whether thou dost smile, or sigh;
Or make thy soul to feel, or make
Thy soul to feel not; all goes by—
The smiles that cheer; the griefs that break;
Thee let not such things captive take.

Even she who sets thy heart aglow
With Love's strange lure, half-sad, half-gay,
Must very soon arise and go
Into the dark the wonted way:
What love speech, there, can a man say?

Soon thou, too, softly hence shalt pass,
In silence, to the silent land,
And over thee the heedless grass
Shall wave and the tall jonquils stand;
Possess thy soul; withhold thy hand.

LI PO

A courtly poet called Li Po,
 Silken of hair, with almond eyes,
Over a thousand years ago
 One twilight, when the fire-flies
Danced in the garden of his king,
 Sang a sweet lyric of regret
For birds that trail a broken wing
 Or in the cruel cages fret.

*On silver saddle, on white steed,
 So sang he, goes the frontiersman;
A sword and lance supply his need
 His palace is the mighty span
Of changeful sky, and for his books
 He has the winds and wavering streams;
He goes not grey in scholars' nooks;
 No heavy curtains stale his dreams*

And still we sing so; still we sigh
 In cities to be frontiersmen;
On frontiers, for new lands to try;
 For ever questing, now, as then—

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Thus does that lyric of Li Po,
That sweet far lyric of regret,
Woven a thousand years ago
In China, live and murmur yet.

London, 1908.

THE SONG OF THE FREEMEN

One mocked me, and I turned and saw the skies
Awash with evening, far beyond the hill
Where hill-birds wavered, with their lonely cries,
On the long wavering crest; yea, crying still,
Though hollows were blue-dark, and skyward
fields

Were scarcely lit with light that seemed to be
A memory; such calm the calm sky yields . . .
How far they seem, mockers and mockery;
How wondrous nigh that sunset they gave me.

They sought to maim me, pelting me with stones;
They robbed me, filching from my garden-close
My fair, love-tended blooms—they, the world's
drones

And the world's mighty, life being as it is;
And then they mocked me . . . nay, they mocked
not me!

Theirs the loud laughter; mine the silences;
For every rose they filched, a fairer rose
Bloomed in that other garden no man knows
Save him who makes it, hedged about with tears
And all abloom with sorrows that the years

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Have turned to flowers, sung softly to by trees
High as high poplars, that are reveries.

They forged me fetters and came forth to hale
Me, as a slave, to labor at their oar;
I know not now whether I toiled or not;
I do but mind the music of the gale,
The smooth fronts of the marbled, mounting,
 waves,
Mirroring gulls' wings as the gulls flew o'er.

I mind the winds and waves with friendship
 fraught.
Mayhap they scourged; mayhap they scourged
 me not;
What matter? Even so they are forgot,
Their voices drowned in singing of the slaves.

THE THREE YEW-TREES

The wind that talks in the trees
Is more to me than love;
Talking over the time-worn graves
Where my forefathers lie at ease:
And I heed what the wind says, as it waves
The branches, and soft o'er the worn stones move
Sunlight, and shade of the three yew-trees.

I lie awake and with delight
Hear the rain along the rones,
And smile to think it beats all night
On the grey and time-worn stones;
And the thought of the beds where my fathers lie
Somehow subdues my soul, that says:
"What are the light of a woman's eye
And the feet of the children along the ways?"

I hear the ring of the stone
On the scythes at reaping time,
And take my place with them there;
But somehow I seem alone
'Midst the scythe-men red and the reapers fair
As they bend and bind, where the green hills climb

A LOVER OF THE LAND

From the valley, where are the three yew-trees
And all my people lying at ease.

The men look puzzled on me at times,
As I swing the scythe, and the women smile,
White-teethed women with full red lips,
And arms that shall some man beguile;
But if at the meal-time I should pass
The scones, or the jar from the long, cool grass,
And happen to touch their finger tips,
I look to the vale whence the calm hill climbs,
Where my forefathers lie at ease
'Neath the worn stones and the three yew-trees.

NORTH DEVON

Over there the churchyard is;
The old square steeple
Stands above the old grey stones
With their old-time names—
Sellicks, Acklands, Babbacombes.
That green slope is Silence's;
There he dwells with the dead people,
Having hushed their laughs and moans,
Ended all their prides and shames,
In their six-foot homes.

It is quiet there: when rain comes
The green grass shines through:
When the rain goes the bee hums
And the blackbird pipes too.
But the quiet is not ever broken
Even on Sabbaths by the worship, or the
bell:
There hath Silence set his unseen token,
Set his spell.

And here too, here beyond these sleeping
Ringed and guarded by the rusted, mossy wall,

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Here comes Silence also softly creeping
With his unheard foot-fall.
By the nettled and black-berried byways,
By the lanes, and on the climbing highways,
Even to this highway's end where it goes
down
Over cliffs where gulls and foam are
blown,
He wanders, from his walled green
Sanctuary,
To the immemorial sea.

THE ASH-TREE

This ash-tree, waving all the day
With divagating branches, weaves
A witching pattern I could stay
For ever watching, while the leaves
Come down in showers and strew the lane
To be made mould and dust again.

Like turning a kaleidoscope
Is its enchantment for the eye:
The branches surge, and toss, and grope,
Poise, flurry, rake the pallid sky;
And leaves upon the leaves again
Come down and flutter in the lane.

A sound, as if some distant shore
Sent hence the surge of hidden seas,
Mounts up into a sullen roar,
Then droops to plaintive litanies
Of Autumn and the Autumn rain
And dreams that shall be dreamt again.

Ah me, but I have dreamt them well
Upon my curious pilgrimage,
And loved the leaves that for a spell

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Dance in the sun, till cometh age
And Autumn and the Autumn rain
And all the ancient tale again.

Of Gods and men I do not know;
Both are mysterious unto me;
But like a wistful fool I go—
Or should I say a sage maybe?
And love the sun and love the rain,
And even these dead leaves in the rain.

*Ca'er Onnen, Bangor,
North Wales, 1915.*

THE SONG OF THE PEBBLES PEDLAR

As I cam' doon the water-side
I heard the water on the stanes
(I saw the brichtly-coloured stanes)
But nought heard I o' kelpies' manes,
Nor saw them play wi' drooned men's banes,
As I cam' doon the water-side.

As I cam' doon the side o' Tweed,
Frae Stobo back tae Peebles Toon
(I saw the roofs o' Peebles Toon),
I heard in pools the suckin' soun'
O' eddies swirlin' slowly roun'
As I cam' doon the side o' Tweed.

As I cam' doon the water-side
The lauchter that I heard was no'
(Och aye, I'm very sure 'twas no')
Lauchter o' fairy folk that go
Wi' "milk white limbs" along the flow:
Sic havers mock the water-side.

Nae need for tae invent a thing—
And kelpies nane have ever seen.
Does't no' suffice that in atween

A LOVER OF THE LAND

Sic banks o' trees, and grasses green,
Sic singing waters intervene
Miraculous as onything?

Aye, always doon the water-side
The things I see suffice for me
(It's a' miraculous tae me);
Ilk tree and flourish on the tree,
And this auld water tae the sea
Whimplin' and lauchin' by my side.

THINKING OF SOME LIVING POETS

I do give thanks that in these deadly days
Some poets still, in harder circumstance
Than their fore-runners, cast no longing glance
To the arena of the tinsel bays.

They will not heed the sophist phrase that says:
"In their own fair-ground pipe—that men may
dance,"

Nor turn rare music to rude dissonance,
As he must do who such behest obeys.

Down in the fair-ground, for an evening's hire,
Before their booths so many jesters scream,
And (not content with naphtha-fame) conspire
To cast despite on their discarded dream,
That, doubly, I give thanks ye do not tire.

Pipe on, pipe featly, following the Gleam!

1913.

*"FIRST THE BLADE, THEN THE EAR,
AFTER THAT . . ."*

Whatever the dream I dream may be,
Whatever the hope I hope,
I know, by the flash of the vasty sea,
By the glow on the grassy slope,
By the light that lies along the sky
At night, when the last birds homeward fly,
By the gleam of the wet rose-hedge in June,
By the way that in Winter the grey night falls
When the lonely bird on the moorland calls,
By the fiery sun, and the high, calm moon,
I know, I know in my inmost heart,
I know in my quiet, singing soul
That the Hope lives on and the Fears depart,
And the god in man shall have more control
And more, and more; and the voiceless hope
And the dream too strange to be wholly told,
That some old dead dreamer dreamt on his slope,
Straying along through the wind-blown grass,
Soul in the vastness, feet in the mould,
Shall come to pass;

“FIRST THE BLADE”

And out of Time—Eternity:

And a man shall walk where now he gropes,
Whatever the whole high Dream may be,
Whatever the hope of hopes.

WORDS

I am in love with words . .

With which skilled men have fashioned
Lyrics that sing like birds,

Tales too; with heart impassioned
I am in love with words.

With words am I in love . .

Men have reared fanes of these
As masons do with rough

Hewn stone, shaped as they please—
With words am I in love.

I am in love with words . .

With these skilled minds have made
Aye, songs more sweet than birds',

Aye, towers more strongly stayed
Than towers of stone—with words!
I am in love with words.

POLITICS

I heard them talking politics,
All the different shades:
And as they talked I sat and dreamt
Of deer in forest glades.

I dreamt so deep that I could see
The sunshafts in between
The lightly swaying cedar-boughs,
And the deer dappled green.

The quality of anger came,
The voices louder grew.
Near where I sat there was a door,
And the wind blew through.

I am not better than these men,
Nor nobler, nor more great;
But on their talk of politics
I cannot concentrate.

Somehow I always hear the wind
Moaning below the door;
And the real me strays through a hushed old wood
Or walks on a lonely shore.

A SONG OF REST

Sing us, O dear musicians, a song of lulling,
A song Lethean,
All drowsiness and rest and grief-annulling.
For strenuous pæan,
Urging to war and anxious rivalry,
He hath no need
Whose doom is war. Ah, nay! What need
hath he
At resting-time
For aught but lulling rime
Or soothing reed—
A sweet voice singing that all things are well;
A soft flute fluting its calm minstrelsies;
Earth's murmur vague as that within a shell;
And rest and ease?

We would forget the desolate deadly places
Of foiled endeavor;
Our victories too forget; our foes' dead faces
Forget for ever.
Our doom is war; we would forget our doom,
Would rest our ears,

A SONG OF REST

Weary of hearkening through the night's long
gloom

For sudden foes:

War-weary eyes would close

In dreams, not fears;

From searching the dim slopes for foemen cease.

From warfare would we cease, content and
calm,

The flute-notes entering our hearts with peace,

The voice with balm.

Our doom is war; wherefore, O dear musicians,

Our hearts had rather

The flute than trumpet. As those wise physicians

Who daily gather

Poppy and eglantine and heart-of-ease

For their distilling,

Whate'er in song's high realms are kin to these

Go gather then

And bring again to men,

Physicians willing,

The healing of soft music, ere we go

To-morrow, trumpet-driven, the fighting way:

To-day the sweet voice singing we would know,

The flute to-day.

MY LADY OF DREAMS

(From the French of Paul Verlaine)

Oft-times in dreams intense, she doth appear,
This unknown one I love, who loveth me;
Subtly she changes, yet unchanged is she
Each time she cometh to me, ah how near!
My heart for her transparent is (but clear
For her alone, alas! its mystery).

She smooths my forehead, all my agony
She weeps away, she only, loved and dear.

How looketh she, what color eyes and hair?

I cannot tell! Her name? 'Tis sonorous
And sweet as those that ransomed spirits bear;
No sculptured goddess hath more calm a mien;
And for her voice—not sweeter were to us
Loved voices that now are not—that have been.

EPITAPH

I came, and opening my eyes
Beheld the beauty of the skies;
I saw the soaring of the trees,
And in them heard a talking breeze
That moved me to the heart although
Just what it said I did not know,
Nor what the creeks for ever spoke,
Nor what the waves cried as they broke;
Scarce could I more than but infer,
In lack of an interpreter.
I saw the stars at night, at dawn
Hints of revealment quick withdrawn,
The heels of God among the grey;
And wondering still I went away.

A CAROL FROM FLANDERS

In Flanders on the Christmas morn
The trenchèd foeman lay,
The German and the Briton born—
And it was Christmas Day.

The red sun rose on fields accurst,
The grey fog fled away;
But neither cared to fire the first,
For it was Christmas Day.

They called from each to each across
The hideous disarray
(For terrible had been their loss) :
“O this is Christmas Day!”

Their rifles all they set aside,
One impulse to obey;
'Twas just the men on either side,
Just men—and Christmas Day.

They dug the graves for all their dead
And over them did pray;
And Englishman and German said:
“How strange a Christmas Day!”

A CAROL FROM FLANDERS

Between the trenches then they met,
Shook hands, and e'en did play
At games on which their hearts are set
On happy Christmas Day.

Not all the Emperors and Kings,
Financiers, and they
Who rule us could prevent these things—
For it was Christmas Day.

O ye who read this truthful rime
From Flanders, kneel and say:
*God speed the time when every day
Shall be as Christmas Day.*

Christmas, 1914.

IN MEMORIAM

*Edward Thomas, Poet and Critic,
Killed in Action, 1917*

Lover of England, in the sun and rain,
Of the Welsh marches all the seasons through,
No more by Taf-side will you walk again
And pause to hearken till the dim cuckoo
Calls nearer, wondering why his rich refrain
Does move men so, heard through the May-
time's blue,
Over the gorse-lands; so our hearts have pain,
Knowing not here shall we encounter you.

Lover of England and her songs and tales,
The westland meadows and the westland hills,
Borrow in pocket, wandering through Wild
Wales,
You knew the heath-wind flaunts our little ills.
Of old inn-corners that from sudden gales
Shelter the traveller, while the roads turn rills,
You knew the glamour; how, when daylight fails,
Dear candle-light the mellow chamber fills.

Lover of England and the English speech,
Of those who used it featly to recite

IN MEMORIAM

The old oak's story, or the marvel teach
Of thrush at morning, or of owl at night;
You knew the charm of gold-encrusted beech;
You knew where Cobbett eyed the squire
aright;
You gaily trudged the long white road, to reach
Old Selborne, for the sake of Gilbert White.

Lover of England and the English tongue,
How must they mourn you who did know you
well,
Who've heard you quote old runes our fathers
sung,
Or some new poet's song you had to tell,
As 'twere a noose of words by genius flung
Around Eternity. You, too, the spell
Of words were skilled in, and your phrases rung
Full oft with beauty, like a sacred bell.

And this to Britain, for such Britons dead
For all they stood for in the time of woes:
Britain, forget not why such blood was shed
As his veins ran, who need not from wild rose
In hedges of his isle, or daisies spread
For simple hearts, or any wind that blows
Now ask for solace, vastly comforted,
Beyond where Lethe through the twilight flows.

THEOCRITUS IN ALEXANDRIA

Thus was the coming home of old Theocritus
From Alexandria, where he had been too long:

'Twas on the night that Ptolemy Philadelphus
Was crowned within the innermost pavilion;
Circle on circle round him, feasting and song,
Spreading from him, the centre of it,
Through all the city, night long, even till dawn,
So that the poorest slave, long wont to sit,
Scourged, by the laboring oar, let free that
night

To wander wide-eyed through the murmurous
town,

Felt in his barbarous heart a strange delight
Not from his one night's liberty alone—
But as the ripples when a stone is thrown
In water—so it happened when the crown
Was placed on Ptolemy's brows, even then
Spread the strange revelry unto meanest men.

But at the inmost banquet old Theocritus
Sat with the noblest, 'neath the white-fringed
awning

Upheld, in tribute to God Dionysus,
By pillars thyrsi-shaped. But with no fawning
Sat old Theocritus. Though some men fawn

THEOCRITUS IN ALEXANDRIA

On Kings, not he who once hath known for
King
The Dawn;
For Bride the dewy Evening;
For orchestra the wind's voice and the rills
On the Sicilian hills.

Yet he was skilled in all civilities
And they whose couches by his side were spread
Knew him a King (in other territories
Than Egypt) by his calm, instead
Of by a crown, or by King's raiment:
For who hath known the Summer firmament
With all its stars, above the three-caped isle
Is then a King, and after, for long while.

But when without insult a man might leave
The Banquet, when the Bassarids' procession
Had passed, and the brown women, garlanded
With vines, brought lustful glances to some eyes
About the board, much wine having by then
Been quaffed, Theocritus half turned as to
arise,

Then slowly settled to his couch again—
Because a maiden with a lotus blossom
In her dark hair, and one rose, damask red,
Blooming midway the gold band round her
bosom,
Passed, playing a Sicilian air.

A LOVER OF THE LAND

O simple maid! O simple air!
How touching in the tumult were
These twain unto that wearied one
Who had seen maidens playing thus
When the bright, laboring day was done,
After the milking, as the sun set
On his island home and the high peaks shone
And lamps in the valleys, one by one,
Through the darkening meads of aſphodel
Gleamed forth from the farms that he loved
well—

Maids simple as this sweet maid, but yet
With rosier cheeks as the hillmaids' be,
How touching to Theocritus,
Theocritus of Sicily!

As in old red-roofed Syracuse
Amidſt the ſtreets one morn he met,
With thrilling heart, a fresh wind ſtraying
From the nigh mountains, wet with dews,
A gladsome wind that had been playing
With Spring, and Spring's flowers, dew-fresh yet
When it came thither lightly blowing:
So this maid's coming—and her going.
And as one rises quietly to depart,
Seeking no ſtir from men, a delicate art,
Now rose Theocritus, his face less flushed with
wine
Than with a sadness few there might divine,

THEOCRITUS IN ALEXANDRIA

Or if divining think a trivial thing
To flush his cheek, and 'mongst themselves deride,
Not knowing all the thoughts that move a King
Who hath had stars and sun for his possession,
The calm, untroubled evening for his bride,
For orchestra the music the winds weave,
Rustling of leaves and rills
On the sky-gazing hills.

Rose and escaped and journeyed home
Theocritus, with mind preoccupied
(Now careless as the night's o'er-arching dome
Of Alexandria's triumph, Ptolemy's pride),
Through streets still thronged with men of many
nations,

Castes, tribes, and stations:
The swarthy, white-eyed Nubians, gaily clad;
Men of the East (their lean, wise faces sad
With all the vanity of life they knew)
Shouldering fierce Arabs from the desert places;
And Grecians, and they, too, with thoughtful
faces,

Albeit strong of muscle and of thew,
And something in their bearing that bespoke
How they were sons of men who had done
mightily,

And they not knowing yet their day was done
For conquest of men's lands (nor how should be
Afterward, in men's minds, their high dominion):
Strong men, but last of all that glorious race

A LOVER OF THE LAND

That lit the world with beauty and with grace;
And the calm Jew who goeth stealthily,
Smiling, as to his soul, o'er some vast secret;
And slant-eyed Asian folk who seemed to be
Half fearful of the throng, though part of it.

Through all these, then, Theocritus passed slow,
Wrapped in his cloak and nursing his sad thought,
From Alexandria and from men withdrawn;
Thus found his chamber and there seated him
Still cloaked, nor in the darkness of the room
Lit he the silvern lamp to break the gloom
Of it, or of his heart, but in the dim
Wan half light twixt the night and dawn
Sat, probing in his soul this thing to know—
The meaning of the grief his heart had got;
He being one of these
Who probe to the Founts and stretch to the
Destinies.

The world's high pomps, the Ptolemy's renown
(The King he honored truly) seemed that night,
And morning, very tawdry in his sight:
A foolish thing this feasting round a crown.

Grieved he for lilies lying withering
About the board at which he late had sat?
(For though 'twas Winter much profusion there
Of pallid lily and of blushing rose
Made mock of all the glistening silver-ware.)

THEOCRITUS IN ALEXANDRIA

There lay they dying through the evening
Who should have been asleep, in garden-close.
Came this his sadness through some thought of
that?

Or some rough ordering of a willing slave
By pompous master, overheard by chance,
Smote on his ears like some harsh dissonance
And to his sensitive spirit this grief gave?

Such things may grieve a kindly man,
Or a tranquil man offend;
Thoughts born of things more poignant than
These, make the dark his friend.

Might it not be some jesting utterance
Of Apollonius, with a cynical glance
Toward him across the flowers, as he would thus
Send home with eye-thrust what the lips
Half spake, a jest, yet not a jest
(As one in poison a light arrow dips)?
Nay, such things troubled not Theocritus,
Vexed not his meditative rest.

'Twas just yon sun-girl (with the lotus blossom
In her dark hair
And in her high-girt bosom
The red rose) playing on a simple flute,
Simple as she, a simple air;
'Twas at her fluting and not before

A LOVER OF THE LAND

(Not at the jest of Apollonius
Not worth a soft breath to refute)
This sadness came. But wherefore thus
So sad? Nay, how else could it be
When that the winsome maid had played
An old sweet air of Sicily?
And, ah! How sweet are simple things
Among the rioting of kings!

Then rose he, sadly, aware again
Of all the city murmuring still;
New dawn had just begun to instil
The east with color. Ah! what pain
For that green isle amidst the sea
Shot through his heart, for Sicily!

And at his stirring, or at the dawn,
The bird that o'er the balcony
Had slept night long, a dark cloth drawn
Loose round its cage by the brown slave,
Lest all the torchlight flashing by
On that great night of revelry
Should scare its simple little heart,
Woke, stirred, and stretched its wings apart
With a thin ruffling sound and gave
To the new day a welcoming cry.
Then, as it stirred, somehow the cloth
Loosened and fell; and nothing loth
The bird broke forth in minstrelsy

THEOCRITUS IN ALEXANDRIA

That the old singer heard with tears,
With healing tears the music heard,
For this frail bird
Had come with him from Sicily!

And thinking of the three-caped isle,
The uplands green, the browsing sheep,
The nights of soft and tranquil sleep,
The mornings, sweet as a girl-child's smile,
The piping herdsmen, the lowing herd,
He cried unto the new-waked bird:
"O bird! To-morrow we shall go,
To-morrow o'er the wine-dark sea,
Where Etna's peak of fire and snow
Beacons us home—to Sicily!"

Dundee, 1905.

TO THOSE WHO CALL ME BACK

"Come you back," good friends beseech,
"Come you back from hill and beach,
Come and let men know your name,
Here in London seek for fame."

But I cannot seek her there,
In the heavy, thrice-breathed air.

She meant never much to me;
Tricky jade, I let her be.
If some snatch of song I sing
Dear response of friendship bring,
Good. But feverish to pursue
Fame, for me will never do.

No, I live the life I write,
Writing little for delight
In the living with such things
As that great hawk's patterned wings.
Watch them now go drifting over
And the blue grouse taking cover.

Living only once I choose
Which life I had rather lose:
Talking art in Montparnasse—
Seeing lovely Venus pass;
Talking books in Kensington—
Dwelling with the dusk and dawn.

TO THOSE WHO CALL ME BACK

Here I live all day aware
How the clouds through heaven fare,
How the creeks are liquid gems,
And young cotton-poplar stems
Silver, and the maple trees
Murmurous with queſting bees.

With the weather I muſt dwell
And the ſeaſons' roſary tell.
When the humming-birds fly north
I muſt know. Though little worth
Unto ſome ſuch knowledge be,
It means very much to me.

In September, juſt to hear
Crickets chirring far and near,
Chirring as they'd never ceaſe,
Part of all the Autumn's peace:
Even that, a ſmall thing too,
Holds me here, to tell you true.

Ah forgive me, friends, for this—
But I dare not, dare not miſs,
Cooped in houſes, wind and rain;
I may never come again
This way; I muſt ſee this place,
All its beauty, face to face,
Suns and moons, and tossing trees,
Know the foreſts' Summer eaſe,
Shadows blue in Winter ſnows:
Thus my apologia goes.

Kootenay, 1924.

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